



# Acknowledgement of Country

by Brooke Prentis


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I am a Waka Waka woman. Waka Waka nation is my Grandmother, my Nan's country, and is a nation in the lands now called Queensland.

I was born on the land of the Yidinji people in the place now called Cairns and I have grown up in and until this year resided in southern Gubbi Gubbi country in Kowan Kowan the place now called Redcliffe – just north of Turrbul and Jagera country in Meanjin the place now called Brisbane. I now live in Sydney on the lands of the Gadigal peoples.

Acknowledgements of Country are about acknowledging diverse groups of peoples from over 300 nations, with over 600 dialects of languages, the world's oldest living culture. It is an expression of respect to the peoples and to God. I also say an Acknowledgement of country for me is a prayer. A prayer of thanksgiving to our Almighty Creator who placed Aboriginal peoples here, as his custodians.

It is important for both Aboriginal and non-Indigenous peoples to do an acknowledgement of country as, unless we are from the local Aboriginal peoples, we are visitors to these lands.



It is an absolute privilege to bring this acknowledgement of country at the 34<sup>th</sup> Annual Conference of the Australian and New Zealand Theological Library Association called *Boundless* and especially during NAIDOC Week where we reflect on the 2019 NAIDOC Week theme of *Voice. Treaty. Truth. Let's work together for a shared future.*

### Clapsticks

So tonight, together we acknowledge the Traditional Custodians of the land on which we gather, the Wattamattagal/Wallumedegal (What-a-mat-a-gal) clan and peoples of the Darug nation.

The Elders and Leaders of the local Aboriginal communities are stewards of this land and its waters, as they have been for thousands of years, on behalf of our Almighty Creator.


These clapsticks, made with wood from my Waka Waka country, remind us that beneath the concrete and bitumen, this land holds many stories, all the ceremonies and celebrations seen and heard and been present to, since time immemorial.

We acknowledge the four corners of this land – to the North, the South, the East and the West. God's wondrous creation once abundant with life of all creation – sufficient for all our human needs – a rich environment. The What-a-may-a-gal are the people of the black snapper fish – and so from the rivers to the creeks, to the mangrove swamps, to the Turpentine-Ironbark forest, now endangered... we remember.

We pay our respects to the Elders and Leaders past, present and future. I thank the Elders for the way in which they refresh, revitalize and maintain culture.

As this is NAIDOC Week, it is a special time for me to pay my respects to Elders past and present and to remember my role into the future to continue the fight for equality, reconciliation, and above all – for love.

This NAIDOC Week we also pay our respects to those Aboriginal Christian Leaders and Theologians who have impacted the Australian Church and are inspiring the next generation of Aboriginal Christian Leaders and Theologians – Aunty Jean Phillips, Uncle Rev Graham Paulson, Uncle pastor Ray Minniecon, Uncle Japanangka Granites, Rev Dr Djiniyini Gondarra, and Aunty Rev Denise Champion.



I promise to respect country and walk softly and gently on these ancient lands and call you all to do the same as we remember the words of many Aboriginal Elders who teach us to “care for country and country will care for you”.

An Acknowledgement of Country is more than just words – it’s about heart and mind coming together through a genuine want and act of building relationship with Aboriginal peoples.

As Aboriginal peoples we have a strong spirit of survival – thousands of years of stories and culture. We are a gift to Australia, tonight through this acknowledgement of country you have embraced that gift... however, sadly we are a gift still waiting to be embraced by all of Australia.

Tonight, as we come together at the commencement of this conference, may we each think about how we can more deeply engage in relationship building between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal peoples.

My prayer is that you take our hand as First Nations peoples in friendship and, through that friendship, may we build an Australia that I dream of – one built on truth, justice, love and hope.

And in the words of Aunty Betty Pike:

*May you always stand as tall as a tree*

*Be as strong as the rock Uluru*

*As gentle and still as the morning mist*

*Hold the warmth of the campfire in your heart*

*And may the Creator spirit always walk with you and walk with us.*

*Amen*